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ABSTRACT

This study investigates sex and age differences in on-going emotionality. Systematic convenience sampling was used in conducting two waves of interviews. The interviews involved approaching subjects (n=1205) and asking them questions concerning their present emotional state, how often they experience emotion, etc. The study gives no evidence that males are less emotional than females, and indicates that persons who are older experience emotions less frequently than those who are younger. These and other results are discussed in detail. (SJL)

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Emotionality Across the Life-Span

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A recent poll reported that 6 times as many women said they would prefer to work for a man as would prefer to work for a woman. Beliefs that women are more emotional undoubtedly underlie much of this anti-female-supervisor bias. But which sex is more emotional? While lay and professional opinion agrees that women are more emotional, a throughgoing study of the issue has not been made.

Does emotionality decline with age? Here, unlike the supposed sex differences, research has been done. But the research reported to date largely features interpretations of sophisticated tea leaf readings (as the Rorschach or TAT) or remembered or estimated emotionality. Both the sex- and age-difference questions would be aided by an in-vivo assessment of on-going emotionality in people's typical life-space. This is a report of such a study.

Method

1205 persons aged 10 to 87, 399 male and 806 female, were interrupted in the situations at-home (n= 794), at-work (n= 52), and at-leisure (n= 359) in 12 locations across the U.S. (Los Angeles, Boulder, Colorado, seven locations in Maryland, two locations in West Virginia, and Palm Beach, Florida). Area sampling was employed in 7 locations (for the at-home sample) and systematic convenience sampling in the rest. Overall rejection rate was less than 27%. In the first wave of sampling (n= 459) subjects were approached without warning and asked: 1) are you presently experiencing an emotion? (Y/N) 2) if so, what emotion are you experiencing? 3) what "triggered" the emotion? 4) when was the last time you experienced an emotion? (few minutes ago/within the hour/few hours

ago/ within the day/ yesterday/ few days ago/ within the week/ month or so ago/ year or so ago), 5) how often do you experience an emotion? (hourly/ more than 3 times per day/ about 3 times per day/ about 2 times per day/ daily/ more than 3 times per wee/ about twice a week/ more than 3 times per month/ about twice a month/ monthyly/ a few times a year/ never) and 6) what was your mood of the past half hour? (Pleasant/happy//neutral//unpleasant/unhappy)? The second wave of sampling added the questions "which sex is more emotional, males or females?" and "which sex displays its emotions more frequently, males or females?" The sex, marital status, years of such status, number of children, occupational status of the head of the household, and the race of the respondent were also recorded.

Table 1

Emotionality As a function of age and sex

age	10-17		Y. A.		26-39		M.A.		56-64		old	
sex	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
experiencing an emotion?												
yes	11	43	91	147	75	152	28	67	5	16	6	16
no	13	23	50	101	68	142	35	61	8	22	9	16

The first wave took place in the Winter-Spring, the second in summer. The first featured about 50-50 male and female interviewers and the second only 2 female interviewers.

Results

It should first be noted that the two waves of interviewing generated completely similar results in regard to differences, estimates, and the like with but a single, rather glaring exception -- the incidence of reporting being in an emotional state averaged about 40ish percent in the first wave and about 60ish percent in the second. As we noted no sex-of-interviewer difference in the first wave, perhaps the second-wave results were due to the season, but as the data of the second were all collected by the same 2 young women, precise parameterizing of this dimension awaits further research. The rest of the findings are made the more "solid" by the two-wave similarity. "Without exception"is a rather unusual statement to be able to make in social science.

Emotionality across the life-span

There is clear evidence of declining reportage of emotion as a function of age for both males ($\underline{X}^2$= 11.2; df= 4; $\underline{P}<.05$) and females ($\underline{X}^2>50$; df= 4; $\underline{P}<.001$) (see Table 1). However, both the teen-child age group and the older segments of the life-span could stand some "fleshing out" in terms of numbers of respondents. The incidence and kind of pleasant and unpleasant emotions was proportionately similar across the life-span with the exception of young adulthood (i.e., aged 18 through 25) when the rule of approximately an equal number of pleasant to unpleasant emotions was "broken". In young adulthood approximately twice as many pleasant as unpleasant emotions were reported.

Estimates of "last time I experienced an emotion" (Table 3) and "frequency with which I experience emotions" (Table 4) traced the same pattern as actual

emotion as reported-in-experiencing (TABLE 1) -- that is a "hump" in the 18 through 39 year old age groups. The relative independence of mood and emotion are pointed up by the affective tone of the mood of the past half hour as summarized in Table 6. Mood, obviously traces a relatively constant pattern across the life-span.

Sex differences in emotionality

We found no sex differences in frequency of reported emotion. As Table 1 makes clear, there is simply no reason to believe that the sexes differ in intrapsychic emotionality. But when the sexes are compared in their estimates of either the "last time" or "how frequently" they experienced/experience an emotion, males provide lower estimates. Obviously persons are better able to accuately report what state they are in than what state they were in some time ago or to estimate how often they experience an emotion. Possible reasons for this dramatic discrepancy are not hard to find, witness the following.

Believed sex differences in emotionality

As table 5 makes clear, both sexes believe that females are more emotional than males and both sexes believe that females are more apt to display emotion. Females, even more frequently than males, indicated that females were more apt to display emotion ($X^2 = 8.8$; df= 1; $P < .01$). There are some hints of reversals among the males in beliefs about emotionality toward the latter stages of the life-span, but the stereotypic beliefs are "solid" and pervasive.

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insert Tables 2 thru 6 about here

Table 2

Frequency and Kind of Emotion Reported as a Function of Age and Sex

age	10-17		Y. A.		26-39		M. A.		56-64		old	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Positive emotions												
joy/happiness	5	14	34	52	17	38	4	14		6	2	5
amusement			1	3	2	5		2				
gratitude								1				
love	2	1	7	5		3		2				
enthusiasm				2		1	2					
peacefulness		1	8	9	1	13	1	5	1	2		1
Affectively neutral or questionable emotions												
excitement			1	5	3	4	2	2				
sexual desire			1		3	1						
life-livingness	2	2	2		3	2	1	1	2			
wonder	1	1	2	5	6	5		3				1
Negative emotions												
anger	2	5	3	13	3	9	2	7		1		1
sadness/ depression	4	8	7	7	3	14	8	5		3		2
anxiety/nervous-ness/confusion		3	4	16	5	31	1	9		4		3
fear			1	2	3	1		3				
boredom			2	4	3	3		3	1			
silly/foolish				3	3	1		1				
hunger				1	1		2					
pain			1	1		1				1		
irritable		1	1	2	1	2	2				1	1

Table 3

Last Time Experienced an Emotion (Md underlined)

age	less than 18		Y. A.		26-39		M. A.		56-64		old	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Few minutes ago	4	10	5	63	22	50	2	22	1	5	2	1
Within an hour	2	2	9	15	5	22	3	9	1			2
Few hours ago	-	8	46	18	8	30	3	3		2		1
Within a day	1	7	16	24	15	40	8	13	1	3	4	1
Yesterday	4	14	3	26	11	39	9	15		6		4
Few days ago	4	5	6	6	3	5		5	1	1	1	
Within a week	2	3	1	7	8	7	4	1	1		2	1
Month or so ago	2	2	5	3	2	4	3	2	1	1		1
Year or so ago		1	3	3	4	3	1	5	4	1	1	1

Table 4
How Frequently Do You Experience an Emotion?

	less than 18		Y. A.		26-39		M. A.		56-64		old	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Hourly	3	16	51	59	26	60	3	37	2	5		1
More than 3X/day	4	8	19	39	16	52	6	18	1	4		1
About 3X/day	1	6	5	15	7	17	2	1	3	1	1	
About 2X/day	2	4	5	7	3	8	4	3	2		1	1
Daily	5	12	19	33	17	58	9	23	2	9	3	8
More than 3X/wk	5	5	7	15	8	8	5	4	1	3		2
About 2X/wk	1	3		2	5	8	3	4				3
More than 3X/mo.	1	3	1	5	5	3	2	3		2	2	
About 2X/mo.	1			2	1	7	1	2		1	3	1
Monthly		3	3	2	1	4	3					1
Few times/yr.		2	8	5	6	7	2	10	1	6	5	4
Never		1	3	6	3	5	2	7		1	1	1

Table 5

Which Sex is Believed to Be the Most Emotional?

age	18 y. A		26-39		Middle age 56-64		old	
	males	femal	males	female	male	femal	males	femal	male	femal	male	female
n=	22(%)	60(%)	96 (%)	130(%)	66(%)	142(%)	38(%)	95(%)	10(%)	25(%)	13(%)	23(%)
voted for												
males	2(9)	16(27)	20(21)	26(20)	24(36)	23(16)	21(55)	23(24)	1(10)	7(28)	8(62)	5(22)
females	19(86)	32(53)	63(66)	90(69)	32(48)	118(83)	13(34)	67(70)	7(70)	16(64)	4(31)	16(69)
both/either		4(7)	12(13)	13(10)	9(14)	10(7)	3(8)	4(4)	2(20)	2(8)	1(8)	1(4)

Which Sex is Believed to Display Emotion Most Frequently?

males	5(23)	15(25)	17(18)	6(5)	13(20)	17(12)	9(24)	16(17)		3(12)	1(8)	3(13)
females	15(68)	44(73)	61(63)	119(91)	48(73)	133(94)	25(66)	74(78)	10(100)	20(80)	11(85)	18(78)
both/either	2	2(3)	6(6)	4(3)	3(4)	3(2)	3(8)	4(4)		2(8)	1(8)	1(4)

Table 6

Mood of Past Hour

	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Pleasant/Happy	13(54)	45(70)	23(34)	151(67)	63(66)	163(67)	30(52)	77(64)	8(67)	22(63)	12(75)	18(72)
Neutral	7(29)	15(23)	37(54)	60(27)	27(28)	62(25)	14(24)	31(26)	3(25)	10(29)	4(25)	7(28)
Unpleasant/Unhappy	4(17)	5(8)	8(11)	13(6)	5(5)	20(8)	14(24)	13(11)	1(9)	3(9)		

Discussion

In this, the first large-scale study of intrapsychic emotionality, we found no evidence that males are less emotional than females. Gosling(1962) and others have contended that emotional response is contingent upon one's appraisals of events involving oneself. As males as frequently as females in our society have or are provided reasons to have an emotional reaction to events that involve them, our results make sense. That females estimate their emotionality as more frequent than males estimate their emotionality probably testifies to both sexes "buying" the 'females are more emotional' stereotype. A comparision of Tables 1 and 4 suggests that people generally underestimate their emotionality, males more so than females. Perhaps the more mature male's appraisals of which sex is the more emotional indicate that they, at least, are allowing experiential data to modify or influence their handling of the stereotype. That these same males endorsed the "show less emotion" stereotype may indicate that females do, in fact, more frequently display the emotions that they equally frequently experience with males. A different kind of study is required to index 'display of emotionality'.

It appears that persons who are older experience emotions less frequently than those who are younger. But here again, the estimates of emotionality tend to be lower than our in-vivo sampling would suggest. Overall, it appears that persons in our society are about as apt to be in an emotional state as not at any given instant. If we assume that the differences between the older and younger respondents represent a change on the part of those older from what they were as younger persons, the diminution of emotionality appears to be on the order of about a fifth, or at the outside, a third. Yet the estimates of these older respondents place their emotionality at about twice per day as compared to about 3 times per day for those younger...a reduction of about a third or better. It appears quite possible that the stereotypes about sexual

and age differences in emotionality are influencing estimates of emotionality.

When people say a person is "emotional" they may mean one and/or two things. First, they may mean that a person emotionally reacts, inside his head, to events in the world disproportionately frequently. They may also mean that a person disproportionately reveals his emotional reactions to others. While our results suggest that men are just as "sensitive" as women, they do no preclude the possibility that men do not display or reveal their sensitivity as frequently as women.

Young adulthood appears to be the "brightest" time of life from an emotionality standpoint. If the age differences reveal developmental processes, post-young adulthood must be rather a "downer". From a ratio of twice as many pleasant to unpleasant emotions to 'even-steven' appears a bit of a shock. As this phenomenon turned up in both waves of the study, I suspect we are dealing with a truth here. The reasons for this phenomenon ought to prove intriguing.

Cameron (1975) argued for a fairly sharp distinction between the concepts 'mood' and 'emotion'. Most of the investigators in the field of affectivity tend to "blend" or ignore these distinctions and subsume both under affect (as Nowlis, 1965, who talks about validating a mood checklist that includes concepts as "anger", "irritability", "drowsy", "bored", "sad", and "miserable"). In the present investigation, where respondents were allowed to nominate their own descriptions of their emotional state and then also classified their mood, the notion that mood and emotion are relatively distinct concepts appears far more tenable. Certainly the concepts emtion and mood were differentially responded to by the subjects.

In the only large-scale investigation of mood in-vivo published to date (Cameron, 1975), pleasant mood was reported about 47% of and unpleasant mood about 8% of the time. In the present investigation, pleasant mood was reported about 67% and unpleasant mood about 10% of the time. While the ratio of pleasant to unpleasant mood appears about 6 or 7 to 1 in both studies, the parameters of these events are substantially different, particularly to the pleasant end of the continuum. The previous study reported females less frequently than males experiencing a "neutral" mood. The same finding emerged in the present investigation.

The major finding of the present investigation has to be the lack of a sex difference in emotionality. It will be noted that we arrived at this finding utilizing relatively inelegant and unsophisticated methodology. What we did, I believe, was the kind of thing that ought to have been done in the first place. What was done in the first place was for psychologists to construct closedended questionnaires regarding affectivity, and, typically, retrospective affectivity at that. In the cloak of elegance and sophistication ("How often do you find yourself feeling _____? "very often", "fairly often", "sometimes, but not too often", "hardly ever", "never"?[Dean, 1962] or . . "During the past few weeks did you ever feel 1) pleased about having accomplished something? 2) that things were going your way? 3) bored? 4) upset because someone criticised you? [Bradburn, 1969]) we have generated results that verge upon the unintelligable. While there is nothing wrong, per se with elegance, there is something down right correct about clear questions asked of representative samples of persons. And there is nothing right, per se, about scales. I am reminded of a recent conference at which a "suicide" scale was presented. A psychologist in the audience exclaimed that this scale might be the answer to his problem of 'catching potential suiciders before their

admission'. He was chagrined when another member of the audience pointed out that a question to that effect at admission would accomplish the intent, in less time, and with considerably less ambiguity.

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